

UK children shorter, fatter and sicker, report finds

According to a report by the Food Foundation, children across the UK are getting shorter, fatter and sicker. This concerning deterioration is attributed to an epidemic of poor diets that lack essential nutrients, the aggressive marketing of cheap ultra-processed food, as well as poverty and food insecurity.

The report alerts that millions of children are facing a “timebomb” of avoidable health conditions. The average height of five-year-olds is falling. Obesity levels have increased by almost a third among the young. And the number of young people being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes has risen by more than a fifth.

The findings conclude that failure to reverse this alarming trajectory will result in future generations suffering from diet-related illnesses—along with the mental health impact of living with these diseases—followed by premature death.

Due to the seriousness of this issue, health experts, politicians and food campaigners have warned that if it is not urgently addressed, the crisis could overwhelm the National Health System (NHS) and weaken the economy for decades, as it may leave much of the population too sick to work. “We need the government to take decisive action to make healthy and sustainable food affordable, reduce the constant flow of junk food and realise that investing in children’s health is an investment in the future of the country.”

Interestingly, the report also reveals a significant change in our understanding of health issues. “We used to think that the combination of undernutrition and obesity predominantly affected low- and middle-income nations. However, it is also becoming a concern in more developed countries. In Britain, for instance, we are seeing a dramatic worsening in children’s health in 2024.”

On the other hand, this document additionally highlights that children’s dietary health “has not been taken sufficiently seriously” and that “policy in this area has been mediocre and wholly insufficient to address the severity of the problem.” It points out that the aggressive promotion of cheap junk food, combined with food insecurity caused by poverty and deprivation, creates an environment that makes it extremely difficult to feed children healthily.

The British chef and food campaigner Jamie Oliver has strongly emphasised the need to tackle this problem: “Children are not being given the opportunity to become happy and healthy individuals. We must change this trend if we want to have the healthiest generation of kids. To achieve this, we need to examine the food that sustains us. And right now, what we are finding out is not pretty.”

Fragment adapted from *The Guardian*, June 2024

1. Say whether the following sentences are TRUE or FALSE according to the text. COPY the evidence from the text. No marks will be given without the evidence. (1.5 points)

- a) Despite a clear decline in children’s health, the amount of young people suffering from diabetes has not significantly varied in recent years.
- b) The current dietary habits among young people will have no impact on the British National Health System.
- c) According to the Food Foundation, it is hard for families to encourage healthier eating habits today.

2. Answer the questions below. COPY no more than 10 words and/or a number from the text to answer each question. (1.5 points)

- a) Besides having serious effects on our health in various ways, what other potential consequence might the current unhealthy dietary practices have on people if nothing is done?
- b) What terms does the Food Foundation report use to describe the measures taken so far to fight children's dietary health problems?
- c) Who highlights that today's children lack opportunities to maintain their health and well-being?

3. FIND a word or expression in the text that means... (1 point)

- a) from side to side (lines 1-10)
- b) preventable (lines 1-10)
- c) the opposite of improving (lines 11-20)
- d) tendency (lines 21-29)

4. READ this conversation and COMPLETE your part. Write the numbers (1-6) and complete each sentence on your exam paper. (1.5 points)

Getting ready to watch the Champions Final

- Your friend:** Hey, at last! Tomorrow's the big day!
- You:** You bet it is! Remember that (1) _____.
- Your friend:** What do you mean by my house? Are you crazy or what?
- You:** Don't be funny. (2) _____.
- Your friend:** When did I say anything like that?! My mum hates it when I bring my friends home.
- You:** Then we have some real trouble because (3) _____.
- Your friend:** You did what?! You can't be serious. My mum's going to kill me, that's for sure.
- You:** I'm really sorry. (4) _____.
- Your friend:** We need to think about something quickly because I won't miss this match. Remember, it's the final!
- You:** I know, I know, give me a second. I've got it! (5) _____.
- Your friend:** Yeah, that's it! The place is great and we can shout as much as we want when our team scores!
- You:** Right, give me a moment and I (6) _____.

5. Choose ONLY 3 of the following situations and WRITE what you would say in each one to show that you understand the context of the situation. Write between 10 and 25 words. (1.5 points)

- a) Your parents are considering installing solar panels at home. Say what you think about it.
- b) You have been using your friend's iPhone without his permission. Apologise for this.
- c) Your granddad wants to surprise your grandma for their wedding anniversary. Advise him about what to do.
- d) Your brother is going to Iron Maiden's next concert. Try to persuade him to take you with him.
- e) Your mum asked you to wash the car, but you haven't done it yet. Explain why.

6. Choose ONE of the following topics and WRITE a composition of about 120-150 words. If you choose the email, DO NOT sign it. (3 points)

- a) Write an email to the Food Foundation director telling her about schools' role in promoting healthy eating habits.
- b) In order to protect children, food advertising should be strictly regulated. Give your opinion.



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